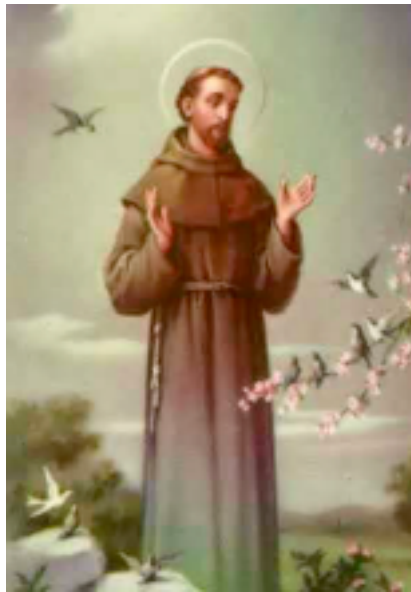


Did You Know....?

By Clem Dougherty

Did You Know... that the year 2013, now passed, marked the 300th anniversary of the birthday of **Junipero Serra**, the first father president of the California missions? Yes, it's true. On November 23, 1713, some 300 years ago, Serra was born to a farmer family as Miquel Jose Serra in Petra on the island of Majorca off the north-east coast of Spain. Serra took the name of Junipero after an early follower of St Francis when Serra later joined the Franciscan Order. In Serra's time Majorca was culturally and linguistically related to Catalonia, the region of north-east Spain centered around the city of Barcelona. To understand Junipero Serra we have to go back and understand the Franciscan Order as founded by St Francis of Assisi (pictured below). St Francis (Francesco in Italian; Francisco in Spanish; Francis in English) was born in 1181, some 6 centuries before Serra, in the town of Assisi located in Tuscany in the central section of Italy. Francis was born into the family of a wealthy cloth merchant and as a youth led a worldly life. While still a young man, Francis suffered a crisis of faith which ended in his abandoning his former life style and in embracing a life of total poverty.



The key to understanding Francis is to understand his complete renunciation of the ownership of property. He owned nothing. During Francis' lifetime (the high Middle Ages) the entire political and economic structure of Europe was one of feudalism based entirely on real property. By renouncing property, Francis was striking at the very heart of medieval society and was offering to his followers an alternative life style based not on property but on God's love and mercy. Francis sought to live as Christ and the apostles lived-- preaching the Gospel, traveling from place to place, poor with no property, dependent on others for food and shelter, and ministering to the poor of the world -- the very persons who occupied the bottom of feudal society. By so doing he hoped to submerge himself and his Order among the people thereby putting into practice those words often attributed to him: "Always preach the **St Francis of Assisi** Gospel and, if necessary, use words." The alternative lifestyle proposed by Francis attracted many followers who wanted something more out of life than what the feudal world based on property had to offer. Thus, Francis gathered about him a group of men who shared his

ideals and who formed with him the Order of Friars Minor ("OFM"), the "little brothers," or as we have called them, the Franciscan Order.

As time went on and the OFM grew, it became apparent that as a practical matter the OFM had to organize themselves so that their members could be properly housed, clothed, and fed. Francis to the end of his life opposed any compromise with his vow of absolute poverty. However, the Pope, by this time Honorious III, formerly approved the Order in 1223 only upon the condition that its rule made practical accommodation for organization of its members. The Pope tried to resolve the contradictions in Francis' approach so as permit the OFM the use of money and property, without outright ownership. Such an approach would have an important effect upon the California missions in that the approach would coincide with Spanish law that the King would own the land, the Franciscans would be only the trustees thereof, and the Indians would be the beneficiaries.

Thus a split arose within the OFM between those who wanted to follow Francis' example of complete poverty and those who believed that some accommodation with reality had to be made. Francis himself remained true to absolute poverty to the date of his death in 1226. His death failed to heal the split. As a result those OFM members who wanted to follow Francis' example became known as the Spiritual Franciscans or the Strict Observants while those OFM members who wanted some accommodation with reality were called the Conventual Franciscans. By the 1400s, the Spiritual Franciscans became the dominant branch of the Franciscan Order in Spain. Cardinal Ximenez de Cisneros, confessor to Queen Isabella and Archbishop of Toledo, the primate of all Spain, was a Spiritual Franciscan. Cisneros so favored the Spirituals that when he died no Conventual House remained in Spain. The Spiritual Franciscans in Spain rejected the relative ease of Conventual Franciscan life, advocated a return to the strict rule of St. Francis with its absolute renunciation of property, practiced extreme self-discipline, emphasized the imminent second coming of Christ and the end of time, and above all, adopted a strong missionary spirit.